Seismograpging Sumatra

By Jackson L. Gordon, ’34eng

Excerpts from a letter to V. E. Monnett, director of the School of Geology

For some time I have intended to write you, but wanted to wait until I got a fair idea of what the nature of foreign service was before I tried to give you an impression of the conditions here, and the circumstances under which we are working. I suppose you still have a vivid memory of your experience under similar circumstances but thought you might appreciate knowing the particulars of our set up.

First I will briefly give you an itinerary of our trip over, which I enjoyed very much. From San Francisco we sailed by Honolulu to Yokohoma, Japan. From there we took a car to Tokyo, took a train across the interior of Japan to Kobe where we boarded the ship again, and then sailed to Hong Kong. After a short stop-over in Manila we progressed over a rough sea to Singapore, where we disembarked, thence to Palembang, Sumatra on an island boat. The longest stop was at Singapore, which we were there four days) but a day in Honolulu was enough to convince me that it was the most beautiful place I've ever been.

We are located, as a party, about ninety-seven kilometers southwest of Palembang into the interior of Sumatra. Believe me it gets plenty lonesome out here in the jungles. There are four of us Americans here in camp and we are working about one hundred twenty Javanese Coolies, (the natives of Sumatra are lazy and more illiterate than those of Java).

The rainy season, which lasts for about six months, is supposed to be over but we still get two or three rains a week. You can imagine what the living conditions are here in this swampy, insect and disease infested country, with all the mosquitoes which we have an abundance of. Our food of course is essentially canned stuff with a few green vegetables and some fruit that we are able to get from the natives. The water we drink comes from the nearby streams and must obviously be boiled and filtered.

Our crew that came over in January has been pretty hard hit in the way of health, as four of us have already been to the Hospital with dysentery, fever, infected mosquito bites and poisoned blood. Dysentery, fevers and skin diseases are the most common health hazards, although there has never been a fatality that I have heard of. It is certainly a great sacrifice and one that helps a little.

We have three pet monkeys which serve to attract our attention when snakes come into camp. I have killed five or six snakes, two of which were over eight feet long and more poisonous than the cobra, and one boy killed a 400-pound black bear.

As for the customs and strange beliefs of the natives here, they are so numerous that I could never get them all, but the predominant religion is Mohammedanism and most all the natives are very staunch adherents. You never see one indulge in intoxicating drinks, and although the children up to about twelve years of age go nude the adults are adequately clothed, contrary to the custom in Java where the women wear nothing above the waist.

We have not had any rain for three days now and the natives in the nearby Kompong (native village) are praying and beating their drums for it to rain. They have prayer services every hour of the day and you can hear a "gong" every morning, noon and night, signifying the call of family with dysentery, fever, infected mosquito bites and poisoned blood. Dysentery, fevers and skin diseases are the most common health hazards, although there has never been a fatality that I have heard of. It is certainly a great sacrifice and one that helps a little.

We are doing reflection work now all together, although there has been a refraction crew up until the last week. Frankly I do not believe this is much of a seismograph country but I suppose it is what we save the company instead of what we make them that justifies our work. This country is very muchly folded and faulted. Steep dips and lensing work rather adversely against good reflections and accurate correlation, and surface conditions make some of our work hardly accessible.

There are a lot of wild animals here, such as elephants, tigers, tapirs, wild hogs, deer, crocodiles, snakes, large lizards, bears, monkeys (galore), and Orang Utans. We have had fresh pork several times but none of us has killed any deer as yet. We have three peat monkeys which serve to attract our attention when snakes come into camp. I have killed five or six snakes, two of which were over eight feet long and more poisonous than the cobra, and one boy killed a 400-pound black bear.

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About our only recreation is badminton, when it isn't too wet to play. We get to go into Palembang once or twice a month but there is nothing to do there but go to a show. The theater is more or less a tin-roof barn and if it rains there is obviously so much noise that one cannot hear anything, so you get a rain check and go back some other time. But it is a change, and that helps a little.

Palembang has a population of approximately forty thousand people, of which there are about fifty Americans, a few more Dutchmen, some Japanese and Chi-
TULSA'S Philip Wade, Tulsa, has been named head

Dick Musser, Enid, has been named pres-

idente of the Sophomore Class. Other new

soph officers are Douglas Stewart, Nor-

man, vice president; Marcelee Peters,

Mountain View, secretary, and Jean Dan-

iels, Tulsa, treasurer.

... John Tippit, Sallisaw, is president

of the senior law class ... A. M. Brikey,

Jr., ’39, is president of the freshman class

doing the University of Medicine ... 

Although the position in the School of

Pharmacy left vacant this fall by resigna-

tion of Dr. Ralph Beegle, associate pro-

fessor of commercial pharmacy, was not fill-

ed, the school has continued all the regular

two additional courses were inserted. Other

members of the faculty teach the courses.

... An editorial insinuation of the Tal-

sa Tribune that the student loan funds at

the University were politically manipulat-

ted brought a quick retort from O.U. of-

ficials. The Tribune editorial asked "How

did it happen that the student loan funds

at the University of Oklahoma which were

supposed to go to deserving penniless

ysters, have been handed out almost

exclusively to the youthful supporters of

Senator Josh Lee?" Dean S. W. Reaves, a

member of the student loan committee,

promptly declared that there was no truth

whatever in the charge.

... Mrs. Flora D. Nifong, housemoth-
er at the Kappa Sigma fraternity house for

fourteen years, has resigned because of ill

health. She has returned to St. Louis, Mis-

souri, her former home ... Twenty-seven

pieces of sculpture by faculty members

and students of the University School of

Art were exhibited in the Museum of Fine

Arts at Dallas, Texas, in November ... 

The Presbyterian Foundation of Oklaho-

ma has started a campaign for $250,000 to

build a new church and student center in

Norman, and erect additional church facil-

ities in Stillwater ... The European war

has seriously reduced the production of

new books, particularly in Germany and

France, and therefore threatens a shortage

of literary material for Books Abroad, the

international book review quarterly pub-

lished at the University. Dr. Roy Temple

House, editor, said that he had enough

material on hand for the fall and winter

issues, but that continuation of the war

might cause serious difficulty in subsequent

issues.

Rhodes scholar returns

His studies as a Rhodes scholar cut

short by war, dapper Jack Luttrell, ’38,

who left the Norman campus to enter Ox-

ford University, has returned to enroll in

the University School of Law.

Said Luttrell to reporters on his arrival

in Norman: "I'm glad to be back in a

country where a 24-hour course in bom-
b dodging isn't part of the curriculum."

He addressed students of the School of

Journalism in the first of this year's jour-
nalism lectures.

A paper copy of this issue is available at

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